

PREMISES REPORT

Given the last 12 months we have all experienced, with restrictions and lockdowns, you would expect that there would be very little to report on a club premises that has been very lightly used over the period. Interestingly on reflection I found this not to be the case.

The year started with Storm Ciara damaging the pontoon hammerhead and collapsing a pile. Fast action by local contractor Predator secured the damaged sections in the teeth of the storm, which was remarkable to watch and saved the errant pontoon section from completely detaching and causing damage elsewhere on the river.

Some 14 days later, Storm Dennis, one of the most intense extratropical cyclones ever recorded, compounded this damage and sank one of the pontoons which subsequently damaged a walkway pontoon. Further fast action by Predator made the now severely damaged structure safe and Priors cleared up the loose poly concrete floats and polystyrene sections that had broken up and were distributed along the foreshore.

Despite this being a disaster and completely disabling our pontoon for a long period, a significant insurance settlement for this can be seen in the club accounts.

Following the lockdown commencing on the 23rd of March, it was unclear when lockdown restrictions would be eased to allow us to re-open the club for hospitality and what form that hospitality would be allowed to take. Despite this uncertainty we knew that something needed to be done to prepare the club for safe opening as soon as allowed. We installed Covid processes, performed essential risk analysis and installed physical protection to the bars, whilst trying to maintain the expected look and feel of the RBYC bar areas.

Whilst the lockdown and closure of the club was devastating to us all, it gave us the rare opportunity to implement a programme of works that would have been much more difficult had the club been in full operation.

The dining room parquet flooring was renovated and re-finished.

The courtyard balcony was completely resurfaced with an epoxy based finish that improved the tired look of the old surface and preserved and waterproofed the surface for some years to come.

The Library Bar was replaced with a new oak surface and the wonderful wooden roller shutters were renovated and restored to working order. Following the repair of the Library Bar roof, the damaged ceiling was replaced and the library bar was re-decorated restoring this facility to its former glory and making it usable for a private and external functions.

As soon as it was anticipated that hospitality was likely to be allowed outside, the rather decrepit old courtyard bar was completely re-built, extending it by a metre and a beautiful solid wood bar top was installed. Significant woodwork repairs to the courtyard balcony and glass roof supports were undertaken and the entire courtyard area was re-painted. This has enhanced and preserved this wonderful courtyard for us all to enjoy again soon.

The pontoon development has not been without its challenges and progress was severely impacted by the first lockdown, resulting in a second MMO application having to be made and progress halted until their approval to proceed was given much later in the year. Walcon were very pragmatic about the delays and stored our already constructed pontoon sections for us on their premises without question or charge. As soon as we were able to proceed they kept the RBYC high on their installation agenda and the pile and old pontoon removal commenced in February.

Difficulties were encountered with the piling sub-contractor which could have resulted in a 10 week delay to the pontoon construction, threatening us with no pontoon for Whitsun. Obviously this would have been a very poor situation to find ourselves in, however Walcon were able to leverage their relationship with another high quality piling contractor and the pile re-sleeving is taking place as I write this, with the new pontoon sections moored off Rice and Coles awaiting deployment. The Pontoon construction and commissioning is on target to be complete in time for Easter as planned.

Despite the new pontoon being of similar width and length to the old pontoon, the final configuration will give us some real advantages. Firstly the hammerhead piles and guides will be internal to the pontoon sections, allowing for a full mooring ability on the inside of the hammerhead without having to avoid the piles. Secondly, we will no longer have piles on the upriver side of the walkway, which will make the passage of dinghy's with sails raised much easier, and thirdly two Versadock ramps, one at each end of the hammerhead will improve out launching ability.

Despite light use over the year, some of the essential premises infrastructure required repair or replacement. For example, the club burglar alarm required replacement, giving us the opportunity to extend the alarm cover to further areas of the club. Also the cellar cooling system terminally failed and the replacement external unit was able to be re-located further away from the courtyard bar giving more access to it.

We do work hard to ensure that our wonderful Club House is maintained to the high standard expected and continue to make improvements wherever we can, but keeping the building fabric and its infrastructure in perfect shape is a continual challenge. Future projects should focus on the roof over the dining room and the skylight which presents a constant battle to keep rain out at times, the race box due to its exposed position and elderly construction and keeping the aged boilers and heating system running which is well past its sell by date to name but a few. Each of these projects require significant investment over and above the premises budget and will be on the agenda for the new General Committee to consider.

David Corr
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